

## Advisory team bristles at being told best way to build freeway

[By Doug Murphy | AFN](#)

March 3, 2008 - 6:36PM

The Arizona Department of Transportation, along with a consulting engineering firm, says it has found the best possible route and design for the South Mountain Loop 202 Freeway.

Which has left some members of the South Mountain Citizens Advisory Team wondering just what they are supposed to provide input on, since many decisions have already been made.

“They didn’t even let us talk about the design” and discounted every alternative as not meeting the basic purpose and need of the freeway, said Brian Smith, who represents the Calabrea Homeowners Association on the advisory team.

His frustration was shared by visitors who listened to several presentations Feb. 28 outlining why nothing but a \$1.7 billion, 10-lane freeway at ground level along Pecos Road and then cutting deeply into two ridges in South Mountain was the preferred option submitted by ADOT to the federal government in a draft environmental impact statement now being studied.

“While the meetings have been open to the public, I think ADOT and the Maricopa Association of Government have contrived a lot of the data to fit their outcome,” said Ahwatukee Foothills resident Bill Ramsey, who is opposed to the freeway.

“I sense some frustration because, does this (meeting) really matter?” Ramsey said after the advisory team was told how the freeway would be built.

According to ADOT’s plans, the freeway would be at ground level, rising up over surface streets at 24th, 32nd and 40th streets, Desert Foothills Parkway and 17th Avenue.

That option would eliminate 317 homes, slightly more than previously estimated, compared with 616 homes eliminated if the freeway were built completely below grade level.

“That’s what bothers me, it was all or nothing,” Smith said, complaining that ADOT and engineering firm HDR didn’t show options, like elsewhere in the Valley where the freeway varies from sunken to above ground to minimize the impact on surrounding neighborhoods.

“They just showed it all below or all above,” Smith said.

The below ground option was discounted, said Ben Spargo of HDR, because it wouldn’t reduce the visual or noise impacts of the freeway. It would also mean another 150 acres and 299 homes used to create six giant water retention ponds.

The plans also call for slicing into two ridges in South Mountain Park and a third nearby ridge.

The cuts would be hundreds of feet deep into ridges that the Gila River Indian Community considers culturally important.

Tunneling was considered, Spargo said, but building the freeway under the ridges would cost from \$230 million to \$1 billion more, and technology lags when it comes to building what should be two 104-foot-wide tunnels.

The Loop 202 was first proposed in 1985, but a lack of funding left the freeway on the drawing board. In 2001, ADOT created the advisory team to help ADOT update the old plan to take into account new construction, especially in the Ahwatukee Foothills area.

Since then, ADOT and the team focused mainly on the west side route with the team recommending connecting to Interstate 10 at the existing Loop 101/I-10 interchange. But ADOT director Victor Mendoza rejected the recommendation in favor of the original 1985 connecting near 55th Avenue, despite concerns about ground pollution and major business relocations in the area around a large

fuel storage facility.

Opponents of the freeway point to lingering questions about how air quality - especially for children at the half-dozen schools within yards of the proposed Loop 202 - would have a significant impact on projected congestion on I-10, especially around the Broadway curve, and if projected traffic loads wouldn't be better accommodated by building the freeway further south and connecting with I-10 further west.

The Gila River Indian Community is often looked on as an alternative to building along Pecos Road, but the Tribal Council has passed several resolutions opposing a freeway on GRIC land. They did give ADOT permission to look at the impact a freeway on Pecos Road would have on Indian land, which should help speed up approval of the draft environmental impact statement.